E 195
.P62

WILLIAM PITT

AS THE

PATRON OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES.

BY THE REV. CARLOS SLAFTER, A.M.

BOSTON: 1896.

E195
.P62

WILLIAM PITT, THE PATRON OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES.

By Carlos Slafter.

YOU doubtless all remember that Robert Burns said of his Epistle to a Young Friend, "Perhaps it may turn out a song, perhaps a sermon." As I am quite sure my production will "turn out a sermon," I have chosen a text which you will find on the west face of the Pillar of Liberty, in these words: *Maxime Patrono Pitt.*

Inscription on Pillar of Liberty.

The Pillar of Liberty
Erected by the Sons of Liberty
in this Vicinity
Laus DEO Regi, et Immunitat^{m}
autoribus q. maxime Patrono
Pitt, qui Rempub. nr fume vulsit.
Faucibus Orci

According to the Diary of Dr. Nathaniel Ames, these words were chiseled in the hard granite on the 11th or 12th day of July, 1766. Their author was doubtless Dr. Ames himself, under the advice, however, of the Sons of Liberty, an assocation, or society, whose members were to be found, probably, in all the more important towns of the thirteen American Colonies.

This paper was read at a meeting of the Dedham Historical Society, held on May 7, 1896. For a full account of the Pillar, by Erastus Worthington, see Anniversary Proceedings of the Town, 1886, pages 170-177, and for a brief account see Register, I. 140. A view of the Pillar and bust as they appeared in 1802 will be found in Vol. I. page 121. See also Vol. II. pages 60, 96, 97, 118.

"Patrono", as it is used in this connection, expresses the relation in which William Pitt was regarded as standing to the American Colonies. The question at once arises whether this relation of patron, or protector, was purely voluntary, for which no compensation was promised, or expected. I find no intimation from any source that any hope of reward influenced the Great Commoner to espouse the cause of the colonies. But the fact that he voluntarily took up their defence, and gave them the benefit of his matchless eloquence and wide popularity, made them eager to engrave on imperishable stone their acknowledgment that he was the chief defender of their liberties.

By the word patrono, then, we are reminded that in a Parliament 3000 miles away, he stood as the one distinguished protector of Colonial rights, and was regarded by the colonists themselves as having peculiar claims to their confidence and affection. The freedmen of ancient Rome had their patrons, generally their former masters, to defend their interests: so the freemen of America, who had never been, and never could be, slaves, looked to William Pitt as their patron, who had now a second time rescued them from impending serfdom. Such are the ideas suggested by the word "patrono", which the stone-cutter Howard entrusted to the granite block, still remaining to express the gratitude of men who then were content to be the subjects of a British sovereign.

An inscription of this import would not have been made at a much later day. It was among the later avowals of colonial allegiance and loyalty; and as the name of Pitt alone of all the great Englishmen of that time was thus honored, it becomes us to keep ourselves familiar with a character which was so revered both in England and throughout her colonies. To enable us to do this, I have collected from various sources some facts of his remarkable career, giving special attention and prominence to those which connected him with the history of the American Colonies and their struggle in defence of their liberties.

William Pitt belonged to a family "not of great distinction, but well respected," that held the suffrage rights of Old Sarum,

which at a later period became the type of rotten boroughs as they were represented in parliament. He was born at Westminster, November 15, 1708, the second son of Robert Pitt and the grandson of Thomas, who was known in England as Diamond Pitt. This appellation was applied to him from the fact, that when he was governor of Madras, or Fort St. George, he came into possession of what was then supposed to be the largest diamond known. This stone of the first water weighed 146 carats, and he sold it to the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France, for £135,000, or about $675,000. The Pitt diamond was the best in quality of all the great diamonds, and when it had afterwards been placed in the crown of France was called the Regent. Its value was then estimated at 500,000 pounds sterling, or about two and a half million dollars. With a part of the proceeds of this diamond Thomas Pitt bought the "burgage tenures" of Old Sarum, which in plain English means, I suppose, the right of representing that borough in the English House of Commons. This right, I think, was exercised successively by the grandfather, father, and oldest brother of William Pitt, and finally by William Pitt himself. Such in brief was the value of the diamond to the fortunate Pitt family.

We are reminded very early in our study of Pitt's life that he was a genuine Englishman, for he inherited the gout largely; which legacy began to make itself felt even when he was a student at Eton preparing for the University of Oxford. In January, 1726, he entered Trinity College, but his gout allowed him no peace there; and, before the year had expired, he sought and found partial relief in travel on the Continent. The time was not lost, however, for he made his excursions useful by studious observation of whatever came in his way. His father dying in 1727, he was obliged to return to England, and, being destitute of income, he had to choose a calling by which he could live. He obtained a cornet's commission in the dragoons. This gave him a support and also furnished him the opportunity and inducement to study the nature and system of the military service, and to become acquainted with the personnel of the army

and navy, which was doubtless of great value to him in later years.

But in 1735, his older brother having been chosen to the House of Commons from another borough, William Pitt took the seat for Old Sarum. While in one sense he represented nobody, for Old Sarum was then a deserted borough, in another sense he represented himself, a force that was some day to sway all England. He soon made his influence felt in opposition to the government headed by Robert Walpole. So, to cripple his young opponent, Sir Robert took away the cornet's commission, a most unwise step, which confirmed Pitt's opposition, and even sharpened it into personal hostility. The Prince of Wales, the leader of the opposition to Walpole, as an offset made the young commoner an officer of his household, which brought him an income that more than compensated for the loss of his cornet's commission.

Pitt had now reached a position for which nature had designed him. Oratory had no better field at that day than the English House of Commons. Speeches were made there to influence its proceedings; not, as our congressional harangues, to fill the newspapers and be read by the speaker's constituents. For that kind of speaking William Pitt had every qualification. Adopting the language of another, "He had all the natural gifts an orator could desire, a commanding presence, a graceful bearing, an eye of piercing brightness, and a voice of the utmost flexibility." But he had more substantial qualities than these. A fervent zeal and intense earnestness of soul beamed from every feature. A burning love of liberty, as Englishmen then understood it, and the most intense patriotism glowed in all his speeches. The welfare of the people and the glory of the empire formed the base line of all his doctrines and all his measures. He aimed at grand results and could make his hearers anticipate them and commit themselves to their achievement.

Mr. Pitt's speeches were, from the necessity of the times, very imperfectly reported. Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote down, and probably more than half composed, some of them for the

Gentleman's Magazine. As an example of these we have the reply of Pitt to Walpole's sneers at his youth; the substance is doubtless the orator's, the words are in the style of the famous reporter. Pitt's opposition to Walpole resulted in that stateman's ceasing to be Prime Minister in 1742. Macaulay intimates that the conduct of Mr. Pitt was unjustly severe, and scarcely honorable; but we may not pause to discuss that charge.

Pitt was still a poor man; but in 1744 he was surprised to receive a legacy of £10,000 from the estate of the Duchess of Marlborough. This gift was perhaps as expressive of her hatred of Walpole as of her admiration of the great commoner. However, it was given, according to the words of her will, "upon account of his merit in the noble defence he has made, for the support of the laws of England, and to prevent the ruin of his country."

The king did not conceal his dislike of the man who had so boldly attacked the corruption and inefficiency of his ministers; he persistently refused to give Mr. Pitt any position in the government till the year 1746. But in February of that year Pitt was made Vice-Treasurer of Ireland; and in the following June he was appointed Paymaster General of the king's forces. These offices gave Mr. Pitt an opportunity to display his public spirit and his integrity. Refusing to profit, as previous treasurers and paymasters had done, by three or four thousand pounds annually by the interest of money lying in his hands and by one half per cent on all foreign subsidies, his conduct created that *public confidence* which was the mainspring of Pitt's power as a statesman. No one before his day had refused these perquisites of office, and his subordinates were amazed at his disinterestedness and self-denial. It was soon everywhere known, and it established a popularity seldom, if ever, equalled in England.

It would involve too many particulars, and call for too many explanations to follow William Pitt's career in all its mutations, its ups and downs, its successes and reverses. In his first experience as Secretary of State in 1756, his power was so limited and thwarted by his associates in office, and his *sovereign*, that

all good results were neutralized; and in 1756 he was dismissed for opposing the king's Continental, or perhaps we should say, Hanoverian policy. Yet this did not impair his popularity. Throughout England the chief towns "voted him addresses and the freedom of their corporations."

The government was soon beset by difficulties and discouragements: the voice of the discarded minister, as might be expected, did not cease to be heard in disparagement of its measures. But in the course of time, after many weeks of negotiation, an arrangement was made between the Duke of Newcastle and Mr. Pitt, the former to be the nominal, the latter the virtual head of the Government. The foreign affairs of the realm were entirely at the great commoner's disposal. This celebrated administration extended from June, 1757, to October, 1761, a little more than four years, "during which," to borrow the language of another, "the biography of Pitt is the history of England."

In an interview with King George II. at the opening of his official term, Mr. Pitt said, "Sire, give me your confidence and I will deserve it." To which the king replied, "Deserve my confidence and you shall have it."

The public service, especially the military, soon felt the touch and pressure of Pitt's hand. He chose able men to command, and then gave them earnest and effective support. Said Sir James Porter, an experienced diplomat of long service, "During Mr. Pitt's administration there was such accurate knowledge and such an active spirit to be seen in all the departments of state, and in all the concerns of the government, and such a striking alteration of manner, as well as in the matter, of official communications, that these circumstances alone would have perfectly convinced me of Mr. Pitt's appointment, even if I had received no other notice of the event."

Another high authority says: "While in office he held no levees, and acquired no possessions, but dedicated his whole time to the duties of his station."

To Americans the most important work of Pitt's administration was the conquest of Canada. Omitting all account of his

success in the Indies by the agency of Lord Clive, and his performance in Europe by effectually aiding and securing the success of Frederic the Great, the results of his administration in America might be given in the following order: In 1758 Louisburg and St. John were taken, and Forts Frontenac and Du Quesne subdued. In 1759 Niagara, Ticonderoga, and Crown Point were taken, and as the crowning event of the year, the army of Montcalm was defeated and Quebec captured. Montreal was the prize of the campaign of 1760. This completed his first rescue of the Colonies from destruction, "faucibus orci." The next year, the last of his administration, he destroyed the French power in India and annihilated the French marine, capturing or destroying 44 ships of the line, carrying 50 to 84 guns each, 61 frigates of 20 to 44 guns each, and 26 sloops of war, of 8 to 18 guns each. That was the time when to love England meant fierce hatred of France.

The blotting out of the French power in America left the Colonies here in perfect security and content. Consequently William Pitt was without a rival in their esteem and affections. With reason they might style him Patronus, or Patronus Maximus.

It is interesting to imagine Pitt's feelings as he beheld the fruits or results of his labors. He had planned the emancipation of America from French power and influence, and he now saw it as an Empire disenthralled. He desired to unite it to the mother country as a grand bulwark of her power and glory. He had indulged in noble visions of the future, and now he saw them advancing to become realities.

The most valuable part of North America, the great bulk of it in fact, was to make the greater England if wisdom marked the counsels of the British government. Pitt saw and felt deeply all this, and the vision took possession of his great soul and was the last theme of his eloquence.

But, although the power of this master hand in the government had borne such noble fruits, it was near its end. George the Third came to the throne in 1760. He thoroughly disliked William Pitt. Bute was his favorite, and was soon made Secre-

tary of State. Pitt ceased to control the foreign affairs, and resigned his office in October, 1761. A historian of the time attributed his fall to "the corruption and avarice of such as paid homage to the distribution of rewards;" but he also adds, "although proscribed in the Court of his sovereign, he maintained a place in the hearts of the people."

Discouraged by the treatment received from the king, and broken in health, Mr. Pitt took no active part in politics for several years, seldom even appearing in parliament. But the expenses of the government in prosecuting the successful campaigns of his administration furnished the excuse for attempting to raise a revenue from the American Colonies; and in 1765, when Pitt was confined in his sick bed, the Stamp Act was passed. The excitement which the news of its passing occasioned in the Colonies was a great surprise to the friends of the measure. At first this hostility was regarded as too unreasonable to last, and a swift return to quiet acquiescence was generally looked for. But no abatement of the hostility was seen. An active and violent opposition was developed in all the Colonies, and a few months later the necessity of its repeal was urged upon the parliament. Pitt then reappeared in the House of Commons contending that it was unconstitutional to tax the Colonies.

Under date of March 31, 1766, Dr. Ames wrote in his diary as follows: "Mr. Pitt, that best of men & true patriot, engaged in behalf of America." Had his aid and influence been solicited? As Dr. Franklin was then in London, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the man, who could call down the lightnings from the clouds of heaven, did what he could to enlist in the cause of the Colonies the fiery eloquence of Mr. Pitt. But, however that may have been, the great commoner was earnest and bold in advocating the repeal.

In reference to disorders caused by attempts to enforce the Act in Boston and elsewhere, he said, "I rejoice that America has resisted. Three millions of people so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to submit to be slaves, are fit instru-

ments to make slaves of all the rest." Later on he used these remarkable words: "The Americans have been wronged. They have been driven to madness by your injustice. Will you punish them for the madness which you yourselves have occasioned." As a result of his efforts, seconded and supported by an outspoken popular sympathy for America, the Stamp Act was repealed, and King George gave his assent to the act of repeal March 18, 1766. How the news of that repeal was received in this town, and how it was commemorated, I need not relate.

Another period of enforced rest and inactivity threatened Mr. Pitt, and the king took a new method of destroying his influence. Wm. Pitt was an Englishman; and you need not be told that few Englishmen can refuse a title of nobility. By confering an Earldom on Mr. Pitt, George III. took an easy method of removing him from the House of Commons, his appropriate field of action.

Although this did not, so far as we can discover, change or vitiate Mr. Pitt's principles, or corrupt his political ideas; yet it did destroy his popularity. As Earl of Chatham he lost that influence which the name of Pitt everywhere carried with it. In the words of his biographer: "By accepting a peerage, he lost as much and as suddenly in popularity as he gained in dignity."

As an illustration of this sudden change in the popular feeling, we have the fact that a banquet in honor of Wm. Pitt was in preparation, to be given in the city of London. But as soon as it was known that he had become Earl of Chatham, the grand entertainment was at once abandoned.

But he was now so infirm in health, that under any circumstances, he could have taken little part in public life. After a long season of confirmed and helpless invalidism, he resumed his seat in the House of Lords in the autumn of 1770, and his voice was again raised in opposition to the government's policy in respect to America. He urged the entire repeal of the Revenue Act of Charles Townsend. Lord North, on account of a petition from the merchants and traders of London, moved a partial relief; but he declared that the duty on tea "must be

retained as a mark of supremacy of Parliament and the efficient declaration of the right to govern the Colonies." So the duty on tea was continued, the result doubtless of the persistency of George the Third, who was over-anxious to maintain the prerogatives of his sovereignty.

Lord Chatham's interest in the Colonies did not abate. In 1771 he said, "Were I ten years younger, or in good health, I would spend the remainder of my days in America." This seems to imply something more than interest; in fact, something akin to admiration.

In more than one conversation he was heard to say, "America would prove a staff to support the aged arm of Britain, the oak upon which she might hereafter lean, shielded and protected by filial duty and affection; but his majesty's confidential advisers want to cut down the oak and plant their favorite weed of unconditional surrender."

In 1774 Lord Chatham, moved to withdraw the troops from Boston, assigning as his reason for this and other motions favoring the withdrawal of troops and ending the conflict, that "the mother country had been the aggressor from the beginning." Though some pronounced his language seditious, it produced no effect on his persistency in opposing the Colonial policy of the king and his ministers.

On the 27th of May, 1774, he said: "I sincerely believe the destroying of the tea was the effect of despair." Also on the same occasion: "This, my Lords, has always been my received and unalterable opinion, and I shall carry it to my grave, that this country had no right under heaven to tax America."

The address of the Continental Congress to the people of Great Britain in 1774, ends thus: "Place us in the same situation that we were in at the close of the last war (that is in 1762), and our former harmony will be restored." About the same time Lord Chatham wrote: "I fear the bond of union between us and America will be cut off forever. Devoted England will then have seen her best days, which nothing can restore again."

On Jan. 20, 1775, Lord Chatham moved an address to the king, asking for the removal of the troops from Boston; and in reference to acts of Parliament, shutting up the port of Boston and altering the charter of Massachusetts Bay, he used these words: "I say we must necessarily undo these violent and offensive acts. They must be repealed: you will repeal them. I pledge myself for it, you will in the end repeal them. I stake my reputation on it. I will consent to be taken for an idiot if they are not finally repealed."

On February 1st, 1775, Lord Chatham offered a bill for quieting the troubles in America. It relinquished all right of taxing the Colonies, repealed all obnoxious laws, and secured just rights of trial and also the authority of the Parliament. This pacification bill was of course rejected; but the people took it up, and the Corporation of London thanked Chatham and his supporters. But troubles increased, and instead of pacification, the British king and ministry chose the arbitrament of war. For a while all opposition seemed to be useless.

And yet Lord Chatham did not abandon hope of saving the Colonies. On the 13th of May, 1777, he made a motion to discontinue the war in America, and said in support of it: "I mean the redress of all their grievances, and the right of disposing of their own money, leaving them in the same condition they were in before 1763, when they were entirely happy and contented." His efforts were of no avail, "madness ruled the hour."

But Chatham did not change. Lord Percy moved an address, Nov. 18, 1777, in which the prosecution of the American war was recommended. This Chatham opposed in a noble speech, in which he employed these memorable words: "My Lords, you cannot conquer America. Were I an American as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms, never, never, never."

Soon after this it became evident that the French, the nation which William Pitt had humbled and driven from America, would go to the aid of the Colonies. No wonder this stirred his indignation; and when the Duke of Bedford, on the 7th of

April, 1778, moved an address to the king, in which the necessity of finally admitting the independence of America was insinuated, Chatham, feeble and emaciated, had with much difficulty come in to hear the address.

The dismemberment of the kingdom through French influence and interference, troubled him exceedingly. He rose to speak with great difficulty. The opening of his speech was hardly audible; but he raised his voice to something like his early vigor as he said, "Shall this great kingdom, that has survived whole and entire the Danish depredations, the Scottish inroads, and the Norman conquest, and has withstood the threatened invasion of the Spanish Armada, now fall prostrate before the House of Bourbon? Surely, my Lords, this nation is no longer what it was! Shall a people that seventeen years ago was the terror of the world now stoop so low as to say to its ancient, inveterate enemy, 'Take all we have; only give us peace'? It is impossible."

Apparently much exhausted by this effort he took his seat, and Lord Temple suggested to him that he had forgotton to speak of the plan which he had communicated to him and was intending to urge upon the government, namely, to make such an impression upon France in Europe, that she would be unable to aid the Colonies; and then to offer such a plan of union with the Americans as would reconcile them to the mother country and save the unity of the British Empire. Lord Chatham replied that he would speak again on those points.

The Duke of Richmond spoke briefly in reply, when Lord Chatham attempted to rise again. But after two or three unsuccessful efforts he fainted and fell into his chair; or, as some say, fell down in an apoplectic fit. He was carried out in an insensible condition, and was removed immediately to his private villa at Hayes, where he languished till the eleventh of May, 1778.

Col. Barre communicated the news of his death to the House of Commons. On this occasion all appearance of party was extinguished by the general sadness, and Col. Barre at once moved, "That an humble address be presented. 'That his

Majesty will be generously pleased to give directions that the remains of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, be interred at the public expense, and that a monument be erected in the collegiate church of St. Peter, Westminster, to the memory of that great and excellent statesman, bearing an inscription expressive of the sentiments of the people on so great and irreparable a loss."

Lord North came in while this motion was reading; and, on learning what the proposals were, expressed his regret at not having been present to make the motion himself. The motion was agreed to unanimously.

Lord John Cavendish proposed in the House of Lords "that ample provision be made for the family of the man who had, whilst in the nation's service, neglected his own affairs and never availed himself of the greatest opportunities of enriching himself."

Appropriate eulogies were pronounced in both Houses of Parliament; and one speaker, referring to his last hours, said, "His whole study, his whole employment, his only attention were the exaltation of his country and the humiliation of her enemies. He grieved at the prohibition laid on the execution of his plans; and he died in an effort to preserve the dominion of a continent which he had in part acquired, and would have wholly secured to the British name forever."

I will add to this the words of an unknown author, who seems to have given in two sentences a good explanation of Pitt's mighty influence. "He was the first to discern that public opinion, though slow to form, and slow to act, is in the end the *paramount power in the state*, and he was the first to *use it*, not in an emergency merely, but *throughout a whole political career*. To the people of England and her Colonies, he was endeared, as a statesman who could *do, or suffer nothing base:* and he had the rare power of *transfusing his own indomitable energy and courage into all who served under him*."

This paper, ladies and gentlemen, to which you have listened, I fear, at the expense of much patience, is the result of an effort to satisfy myself that the Sons of Liberty bestowed on the name

of William Pitt no empty or undeserved honor. I have been gratified in finding that Mr. Pitt never, as some have assumed, ceased to favor the liberties and respect the rights of the American Colonies. He evidently desired to embody them in the British Empire, giving them equal powers and privileges with their brethren in England. He never proposed to conquer them, or thought it possible. He would have resisted and destroyed the power of France in Europe, and then would have won back the alienated Colonies by a restoration of all their rights, and thus made them a contented and happy part of the Empire which he had so loyally served, and which he desired so much to aggrandize and exalt.

H121 74

LB Ap '05

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:

PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066
(412) 779-2111

MAR 74
N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 007 957 614 1